PATTERNS OF POWER

The Machine That Runs Itself

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The Foundational Statement — How the Few Govern the Many by Setting, on a Floor No One Can Leave and Through a Mind That Can Be Reached, the Field a Person Can See and the Two Dials by Which He Decides; Why the Same Basic Machine Runs Itself Cheaply in the Orders That Drove Their Belief Deep — Christendom, the Mandate of Heaven — and Must Be Held Down by Force and Surveillance in the Orders That Did Not; Why Reaching That State Takes Generations Many Never Get; and Why the Machine Cannot Be Escaped, Only Built Better or Worse — Held as Tested, Not Revealed

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A STUDY IN THE PATTERNS OF POWER

Preface

This is the foundational statement of the whole body of work, written to be read cold and to make every other paper in the collection legible as an elaboration of one machine. It takes no partisan or theological position. Its claims are structural and functional: it describes how the arrangement tends to work, not whether any belief inside it is true and not whether the arrangement is good. The reader is asked to hold the stance the whole collection keeps, which is the careful separation of two questions usually run together — how a thing operates, and whether it ought to.

It is a rewriting, and the reason for it should be said plainly, because the rewriting corrects two things at once. The first is an omission: the original statement said that a person's position sets the two dials by which he decides — what he counts as a benefit and whether a cost is real — and that was true and is kept, but it began one step too late, because before a position sets a man's dials it draws the field of what he can see at all, and a great deal of the machine's quiet power lives in that prior drawing. This version puts the field of the visible where it belongs, beneath the dials. The second correction is more important and is the reason the rewriting could not wait. The original was read, too often, as though every governing arrangement were the same machine running equally well — as though to name the mechanism were to say that all orders are interchangeable, all rule equally a fraud, the surveillance state and the settled faith two faces of one thing. That reading is false, and the title is partly to blame for it, because the title names an *achievement* and was mistaken for a description. Not every machine runs itself. The phrase describes the cheap, mature, self-running state that some orders reach and many never do — the state in which belief has been driven so deep into a population's formation that the people hold the arrangement

up themselves and the rulers' own force can retreat to the margins. Orders that reach it — Latin Christendom, the Sunni legal-theological synthesis, the Chinese imperial order under the Mandate of Heaven — run for centuries on the governed's own conviction. Orders that do not reach it must be held down the expensive way, by force applied continuously and by the surveillance that force requires, and they are brittle and usually brief. Between the two poles lies a gradient, and reaching the cheap end of it takes generations of deep formation — sometimes, as with caste, the better part of a thousand years. The machine is one basic template; how well it runs, how cheaply, and how much it must be held down by the sword are the variables, and they are most of what the collection studies. This version makes the gradient a load-bearing part of the statement, so that no reader can take the machine for a single uniform thing again.

A Note on this Collaboration

The framework in these pages is Thomas J. Bryan's: the governing insight that durable rule rests on managed belief laid over a floor of force; that people decide by weighing expected benefit against expected cost, with benefit set by what they were formed to value and cost real only where someone is held to account; that beneath both, a person's position fixes the very field of what he can see; and that arrangements endure to the degree that they set the field and both dials in their own favour, cheaply, across the generations. The recognition that the machine is a gradient and not a binary — that the same template runs itself in some orders and must be held down by force in others, and that reaching the self-running state is a slow achievement many orders never complete — is his, worked out across the collection's later studies and here brought to the

centre of the foundational statement. The research, the reconstruction, the verification, and the writing are the work of Claude (Anthropic), directed throughout by that framework. Neither half would be what it is without the other. The whole is offered, like the method it states, as tested, not revealed.

The Argument in Ten Parts

1 — The Question. The few govern the many across centuries far more stably than the numbers should allow, and the durable holding is mostly not external force pressing on a population that would spring back, but internal: the governed hold the arrangement up themselves. The machine, once built, *tends* to run itself — but only the orders that finish building it, and many do not.

2 — The Engine and the Two Dials. Everyone runs one engine — benefit weighed against cost — and two dials must be set before it turns: what a person counts as a benefit, set by the values his formation installed, and whether a cost is real, set by whether a credible accounting reaches him. This is position logic, and it needs no conspiracy and no class-mind.

3 — What the Position Lets You See. Beneath the dials lies the field of the visible: a position fixes what a person can know, consider, and even perceive as a fact — the tide the man on the water must know and the man a mile inland never considers. The horizon feels total from inside, and because one can weigh only what is in one's field, whoever draws the field governs the decision before the dials are read.

4 — The Floor: Why Leaving Is Not an Option. The dials would not matter if the dissatisfied could leave; mostly they cannot. Circumscription made early populations capturable; grain made them taxable; and the modern apparatus, having grown the population past any number the unimproved land could feed, has made exit lead to mass death rather than freedom. The floor is a trap with a one-way door.

5 — The Lock: Why the Dials Can Be Set. The mind was built for the small band and runs now at vast scale, and several of its ancient features — deference to the marked authority, loyalty to the in-group, the sacred-value lock with its built-in drive to punish, reasoning in story, the sunk cost of formation — are the openings through which the field and the first dial can be set from outside, and a symbol made to stand in for an enforcer on the second.

6 — The Build, and Why Not Every Machine Runs Itself. The order begins on the sword, with the cost dial doing all the work; the coalitions that endure attach a belief and install it over generations until the benefit dial carries the load and force can withdraw. This is a journey along a gradient of holding-cost, and it is the heart of the matter that not every order completes it: the cheap self-running pole and the expensive force-and-surveillance pole are the same machine at opposite stages, and reaching the cheap end takes deep formation and time many orders never get.

7 — The Seam: Who Keeps the Values and Works the Valves. A story cannot interpret itself, and a population formed to revere one cannot reinterpret it, so an interpreter class arises at the chokepoint between the people and the knowledge they cannot reach — the seam. It works two valves, feeding

the authorised reading and starving the rival, and because the sacred rule is rigid for whoever hears it raw and supple for whoever controls its reframing, it binds the commoner and bends for the powerful.

8 — The Raised Stone. The whole machine fires in a single act: a crowd stoning a violator under a sacred law its own apex wrote generations before, the loaded text inherited as the word of God, the seam pronouncing the verdict, and the second dial discharged through the people's own hands — the few having spent nothing, the many enforcing the few's order and feeling virtuous doing it. This is the self-running machine at full function, and it shows what the cheap pole looks like from inside.

9 — Durable, Not Inescapable. Seeing the machine does not by itself free anyone, because both dials and the drawn horizon are set against the seeing; but expensive is not impossible. People do re-form their values and redraw their fields, by study and by conversion — though almost always into another formation rather than out of all formation, exchanging one benefit column and one horizon for another, not escaping into a free clarity that does not exist.

10 — What Is Possible, and the Whole in One View. The machine cannot be removed — the floor leads only to mass death and the vacuum reloads the machine under new names — but it can be built better or worse, and the whole gradient from the cheap-and-cruel to the cheap-and-restrained is the space of the actually possible. The work that is neither the romantic's delusion nor the cynic's surrender is to keep the seam crowded and the dials hard to set from a single hand, and so to push a given order toward the better end of the only difference there was ever room to make.

A Note on Sources

This paper states the engine the rest of the collection assumes, and draws less on new sources than on the corpus and the standard record. On the floor: Robert Carneiro's circumscription theory of state origins and the disputes that have made it a tendency rather than a law; James Scott on grain and the legibility of the early states; and the literature on synthetic nitrogen, the Haber–Bosch process, and the dependence of present population on it, associated with Vaclav Smil and others. On the lock: the work of Philip Tetlock and colleagues on sacred values, the outrage they provoke, the built-in drive to punish the violator and the non-punisher, and the asymmetry by which a forbidden trade-off heard raw is rigid while the same act reframed is forgiven; Daniel Kahneman's fast-and-slow model, used only in its uncontested core and flagged as a model under live debate; the evolutionary-mismatch literature of Ronald Giphart and Mark van Vugt; and Robin Dunbar on the small group the social brain was built for. The collection's own developments are load-bearing here and named where they fall: the holding-cost gradient and the apex's awareness by position, from *The Cheapest Hold*; the field of the visible and the tide that the man on the water knows, from *Position Logic* and *The Cheapest Hold*; the seam, the two valves, and the division of knowing, from *The Necessary Seam* and its companions. Behind all of it stands a long lineage — David Hume on government resting on opinion, Étienne de La Boétie on voluntary servitude, Gaetano Mosca on the political formula, Max Weber on legitimacy and the routinisation of charisma, Antonio Gramsci on hegemony, Pierre Bourdieu on the *doxa* that makes an arbitrary order feel like nature — and the collection departs from each where the departure falls. The companion case studies carry the gradient into the record. Everything is offered to be argued with.

PART 1

The Question

> *That the oldest and most stubborn fact about large societies is that a few consume a disproportionate share of what the many produce, and that the arrangement holds across centuries far more stably than the numbers of the few or the strength of the many should allow; that the two usual explanations — held down by force, or duped by a lie — both picture an external thing pressing on a population that would otherwise spring back, and both are mostly wrong, because in the durable cases the holding is internal, the governed upholding the arrangement on their own real beliefs and interests; so that the machine, once built, tends to run itself — but only in the orders that finish building it, which is a thing many never do*

THE OLDEST AND MOST STUBBORN FACT ABOUT LARGE HUman societies is that a few people consume a disproportionate share of what the many produce, and that the arrangement persists across centuries — through famine and plague and war and the turnover of every individual who ever lived inside it — far more stably than the numbers of the few or the resources of the many would lead anyone to predict. A village of a few hundred can be ruled by a handful. An empire of millions can be ruled by a class that would fit in a single hall. The many vastly outnumber the few, vastly outweigh them in muscle and hands and need, and could in principle sweep them away in an afternoon. They almost never do. The arrangement holds, and the holding is the thing to be explained.

The two most common explanations are wrong in the same way. The romantic answer says the many are kept down by force and ignorance and will rise when the force lifts or the ignorance clears. The cynical answer says

the many are duped by a clever ruling class that manufactures their consent. Both picture an external thing — the soldier, the lie — pressing on a population that would, if the pressure were removed, spring back into some other and freer shape. The answer this collection reaches, across many civilisations and many centuries, is that in the durable cases there is usually no such external thing pressing on a population that would otherwise spring back, because the holding is mostly not external. It is internal. The arrangement is held up by the very people it governs, acting on their own real beliefs and their own real interests, with the ruling class needing to apply direct force only at the margins. The machine, once built, tends to run itself.

The word *tends* is load-bearing and will recur, and so is a qualification the original statement of this argument did not press hard enough, with the result that it was misread. The machine is not a single uniform thing that every order possesses in equal measure. It is a template that orders build to wildly differing degrees of completeness, and the phrase *runs itself* names not the universal condition of all rule but the mature, cheap, self-running state that some orders reach and many never do. There is an enormous and consequential difference between an order in which belief has been driven so deep that the population enforces the arrangement on itself for free, and an order in which belief never took, so that the apex must hold the whole thing down by force applied continuously and by the watching that continuous force requires. The first runs itself; the second must be run, expensively, every day. Both are the same machine, but at opposite stages of its building, and to mistake the one for the other — to imagine that naming the mechanism makes the settled faith and the surveillance state into the same object — is the error this version exists in part to forbid. The collection's later parts will lay the gradient out in full; it is enough here to plant it, because it changes how the central claim must be heard. The claim is not that all orders run themselves. It is that the orders which *do* run them-

selves are held up from inside, by the governed, and that this is why they are so durable; while the orders which do *not* are held up from outside, by force, and that this is why they are so brittle and so cruel. The whole of what follows is an account of how an order gets from the second condition to the first — and of why the journey is long, why many never complete it, and what it costs the people inside it at every stage of the way.

This is the question the collection exists to answer, and it answers it by refusing, at the outset, the agent above people's heads that every grand theory smuggles in. There is no History here doing the work, no spirit of the age, no class-mind, no invisible hand. There are only human beings, one at a time, each deciding from where he stands, and the great pattern — the easiness with which the few govern the many — is only what a multitude of those separate decisions adds up to when the picture is seen from far enough away. To understand power is to bring the lens back down to where the deciding happens, and to ask the two questions, soon to be three, that explain a human act: what could this person see from where he stood, what was he formed to value, and what could it credibly cost him to do otherwise. The statement that follows builds the answer around that single human engine, and then shows how a handful of facts that no one chose allow the engine to be set, over generations, in the rulers' favour — cheaply in the orders that manage it, never in the orders that do not — and how the same facts, read the other way, explain why the setting can also come loose.

PART 2

The Engine and the Two Dials

> *That everyone runs one engine — a person does what he expects will benefit him, weighed against what he expects it will cost him — and that this truism becomes an instrument only when two things are set, neither given by nature and both exactly what a governing arrangement learns to set: what the person counts as a benefit, filled by the values his formation installed before he could weigh them, and whether a cost is real, which holds only where a credible accounting can reach him; so that to read both dials for a person in a moment is to see, in tendency, what he will do — and that this needs no conspiracy and no class-mind, only many people in like positions running the same arithmetic*

BEGIN WITH THE ENGINE, BECAUSE EVERYTHING ELSE IS A description of how the engine gets set. People do what they expect will benefit them, weighed against what they expect it will cost them. That is the whole of it — ordinary cost and benefit, the common sense of how a person weighs a choice — and stated baldly it explains nothing, because everyone runs it and yet people in the same situation often decide alike while people in different situations decide differently. What turns a truism into an instrument is the recognition that two things must be set before the engine can run, that neither is given by nature, and that they are exactly the two things a governing arrangement learns to set.

The first thing that must be set is what the person counts as a benefit, and this is the deeper of the two and the one most easily missed. To know what will benefit a person you have to know what he values, and what a

person values is not read off the world; it is installed in him, mostly early, mostly by others, before he was in any position to weigh it. The man formed inside a faith does not experience its obligations as costs to be set against his other interests. Being faithful is itself among the highest benefits his value system contains, because his formation put it there. Ask him to betray it for money and you are not offering him a better deal; you are offering him a loss, and he will refuse the way a person refuses to sell something sacred. His benefit column was filled in for him, and he is reasoning correctly from values placed in him before he could question them. This is the first dial, and it is the one the collection cares about most, because whoever fills a person's benefit column has already won most of the argument without ever having to make it.

The second thing that must be set is whether a cost is real, and here the mechanism is blunter. A cost is only a cost when someone is held accountable to it — when there is, in fact, something present and able to impose the penalty. A cost that will not be imposed is not a cost; it is a bluff, and people read the difference, often without knowing they are reading it. The law restrains the man on the street while he expects to be caught and stops restraining the same man, with the same values, the moment the watcher is gone, because the penalty fell out of his arithmetic. Accountability is not the existence of a rule; it is the live presence of an enforcer the person believes can and will act. This is the second dial: how much of the cost column is real because someone is keeping account, and how much is empty because no one is.

So the engine is one fixed thing with two dials. The first, set by formation, fills the benefit side with the person's installed values. The second, set by the presence or absence of a credible accounting, fills the cost side with real or merely nominal penalties. Read both dials for a person in a moment, and the engine tells you, in tendency, what he will do. This is what the collection means by *position logic*: a person acts on the costs and benefits

visible from his own position, so that people in like positions tend to decide alike without any coordination, and the aggregate of many separate calculations can look, from outside, like a class acting with one mind when in truth there is no collective mind at all — only many people in similar positions running the same arithmetic on similar dials. The engine needs no conspiracy and no class consciousness. It needs only individuals, their installed values, and their reading of whether deviation will actually cost them — which is precisely why the patterns it produces are so stubborn and so cheap to maintain, requiring no one to direct them.

There is, though, a thing the two-dial picture leaves out, and the next part is given to it, because it sits beneath both dials rather than beside them and governs what there is to weigh at all. Before a person can index a benefit to his values or discount a cost by its credibility, the options and the facts must be *present to him* — in his field, available to be weighed. The two dials describe how a person weighs what is before him. They are silent on what gets to be before him in the first place, and that silence is the deepest part of the machine, because the most complete way to govern a man is not to load his benefit column or fill his cost column but to draw, before either, the field within which both are read.

PART 3

What the Position Lets You See

> *That beneath the two dials lies something prior and more decisive — the field of the visible, the part of the world a person's position lets him see at all; that a position fixes not only what a man may do and what it costs him but what facts reach him, what possibilities occur to him, what stands out as a fact and what never rises into view, so that the tide the man on the water must know is, to the man a mile inland, not a false belief but an absent one; that this field feels total from inside, its edge mistaken for the edge of the world, so that the apex handed the machine to run sees it as a machine while the subject formed inside it cannot; and that because a man can weigh only what is in his field, whoever draws the field has governed the decision before either dial is read*

The two dials tell you how a person weighs the options before him; they are silent on how the options came to be before him, and that prior question turns out to be the deeper one. A position does not merely hand a person a benefit column and a cost column to fill. Before it does that, and more fundamentally, it draws the boundary of what he can see — the facts that reach him, the possibilities that occur to him, the features of the world that stand out as features rather than dissolving into an unnoticed background. Call it the field of the visible. It is set before any weighing begins, and it decides what there is to weigh. A man cannot count as a benefit a good he has never conceived, nor discount a cost from a danger he cannot see, nor choose an action that has never crossed his mind; and which goods he conceives, which dangers he sees, which actions

occur to him are not free to him but fixed, in their largest outlines, by where he stands. Position gives a person his epistemology before it gives him his options, and the machine's deepest hold is here, beneath the dials, in the drawing of the field.

The image to hold is the tide. Consider a fisherman at the shore and a farmer a mile inland, looking on the same sea. The fisherman knows the tide in his body — its turning and its set, the hour the flats can be walked and the hour the channel fills — not because he is cleverer than the farmer but because his position puts him on the water, where the tide is the daily fact that feeds him or drowns him. The farmer may live his whole life beside that same sea and never form a single precise thought about the tide. And here is the point that does the work: the farmer does not hold a *wrong* belief about the tide. He holds *no* belief about it. The tide is not an error in his picture of the sea; it is simply not in his picture, because his position never once handed it to him as a thing to be thought about. He is not mistaken. He is unvisited by the question. And the most telling thing about the field his position drew is that, from inside it, it does not feel like a field at all. It feels like the whole of the sea. The edge of what a position lets a man see is mistaken, silently and without exception, for the edge of what there is — which is why two honest people in two positions can look on one world and report two different worlds, each complete, each obvious, each held with full conviction, neither lying and neither a fool.

This is not a quirk of the inattentive but the standing condition of any finite person in a world too large to see whole, and it deepens with the very advancement that builds the machine. In any society complex enough to divide its labour, knowing itself divides: no single person can hold or check more than a sliver of what his society runs on, so the physician trusts the engineer for the bridge and the engineer the physician for the body, and each is, outside his narrow competence, in the farmer's position with respect to a thousand tides he will never see. The division of labour that makes a

complex society productive is also a division of knowing that leaves every member of it — the most learned included — dependent on an enormous body of fact he cannot personally verify and largely cannot even survey. The horizon is not a failure of particular minds to look harder; it is the cognitive shape of civilisation itself, and the machine is built on it.

The relation of this field to the two dials must be made exact, because it is not just a longer menu but a prior and different thing. The dials operate only on what is already in the field. A man indexes a benefit to his values, but only among the goods he can conceive; he discounts a cost by its credibility, but only among the dangers he can see. Everything outside the field enters at no weight at all, because it never enters the reckoning — the tide is not a cheap option the farmer declines or a costly one he fears; it is an absent one he never weighs. So the field is upstream of the whole ledger, and from this follows the deepest of the machine's moves, deeper than loading the benefit column or filling the cost column: to draw a man's field so that the alternative to the arrangement never appears in it. A benefit column can be argued with; a cost column can be braved; but a possibility that was never in the field is not chosen down — it is simply not there to be chosen, lying out beyond the horizon like the farmer's tide. Whoever governs what reaches a position governs what that position can know, and therefore the logic that can be run from it, before any weighing begins. To control a man's field is a quieter and more complete power than to threaten his cost column, because the threatened man knows he is being moved, whereas the man whose horizon was drawn for him experiences the drawn horizon as simply the world, and defends its edge as the edge of reality.

This is also where the machine divides its knowing between those who run it and those who are run, and the division is by position, not by character. The apex of an order is handed, as the daily content of its position, the problem of holding the arrangement together — of keeping command of the armed men who supply its capacity for force while

extracting from a population that would rather keep what it produces — and a person who must solve that problem, on pain of losing everything, comes to see the belief of the governed as a thing to be tended, the way a sailor comes to know the tide because his position puts him on the water. The subject, formed inside the arrangement, never stands where that problem is live, and so the arrangement never appears to him as a thing that is managed; it appears as the grain of the world, because his field was drawn not to contain the question. The apex sees the machine as a machine; the subject cannot see it at all; and neither is cleverer or more honest than the other — they occupy different positions in the structure, and the structure shows each a different field and hands it to each as the whole. This is why the rulers of a durable order can manage belief without any of them being cynics and without any conspiracy: the position itself produces the awareness at the top and the blindness below, as surely as the shore produces the knowledge of the tide and the inland field its absence.

The earliest and deepest drawer of any person's field is his formation, the part the next sections build, for the institutions that install what a child will count as good also install what he will count as a fact, as obvious, as unthinkable — handing him a whole picture of the sea, the tide left in or drawn out of it according to where his formation placed him, before he is old enough to know a horizon is being handed to him. Hold that for now. The immediate gain is already large, and it reorganises the two-dial picture beneath which it sits: that the first question to ask of any decision, and the first move of any machine, is not what the person wanted or feared but what, from where he stood, he could possibly have seen.

PART 4

The Floor: Why Leaving Is Not an Option

> *That the dials would not matter if a person dissatisfied with how they were set could simply leave, and the first foundational fact is that, in an advanced society, he mostly cannot — because circumscription made early populations capturable where they could not disperse, grain made them taxable because it ripens visibly and all at once to be counted, and the modern apparatus, having grown the population far past any number the unimproved land could feed, has made the exit lead not to freedom but to mass death; so that the arrangement is better understood as a trap with a one-way door than as a contract*

THE TWO DIALS WOULD NOT MATTER IF A PERSON DISSATISfied with how they were set could simply leave. The first foundational fact is that, in an advanced society, he mostly cannot — and the reason is physical, which is why the arrangement is better understood as a trap than as a contract. The matter is clearest at the origin, though the origin is contested and worth stating carefully. The anthropologist Robert Carneiro argued that the earliest states arose where good farmland was hemmed in by desert, mountain, or sea, so that a population pressed against its limits could not simply disperse when a strongman began to coordinate and coerce it: where people could walk away they did, and no state formed; where they were penned by geography they were available to be organised, taxed, and ruled. The argument is illuminating and it is also disputed — there are densely

settled, hemmed-in places, the highlands of New Guinea the most cited, where on Carneiro's logic states should have formed and did not, and Carneiro himself later softened the claim to say that circumscription accelerated state formation rather than strictly causing it. The collection takes the prudent reading: physical circumscription is one strong route by which a population becomes capturable, not the only one and not a law. What matters is the principle the disputes leave standing — that coordination becomes domination most easily where the coordinated cannot leave.

The historian James Scott added that the early states were built on grain, and not by accident, because grain alone among the staples is visible, divisible, storable, and assessable: it ripens at a known time, above ground, all at once, so a tax collector can measure it and take a share. A state can run on wheat that stands in the field to be counted; it cannot easily run on tubers that hide in the ground and are dug as needed. The early states, on Scott's reading, were in part population machines — they gathered people onto the fertile land, set them to producing a surplus, and worked to keep them from fleeing, because the people were the asset. What began under coercion became, over millennia, a dependence that needs no coercion to maintain, because the apparatus that grew to coordinate the farming kept raising the number of people the land could feed, and the number rose to meet it.

The single most concrete measure of how far is nitrogen. Every protein in every living body is built on it, and for the whole of history before the twentieth century the supply of usable nitrogen was the hard ceiling on how much food could be grown. The industrial fixation of nitrogen from the air, the Haber–Bosch process, broke that ceiling early in the twentieth century, and the population, which had hovered near one and a half billion, climbed past eight. Estimates converge, with honest disagreement at the edges about how much is cause and how much correlation, on the order of magnitude:

something close to half the people now alive are fed only because of synthetic nitrogen, and a comparable fraction of the nitrogen in a living human body was fixed not by any natural process but in an industrial reactor. Even the sceptics who object that cheap food drove population rather than the reverse do not dispute the dependence that now exists; they dispute its history. The dependence is the point. The people are, in the most literal chemical sense, partly built out of the apparatus that feeds them.

This is the floor beneath the dials, and the collection calls it the metabolic trap. The population's relation to the coordinating apparatus is metabolic: the apparatus is the metabolism that turns energy into people, and the people cannot survive its interruption any more than a body can survive the stopping of its own. The trap has a one-way door. Each increment of the apparatus let more people live, and those people became the population the next increment had to feed, so the number ratcheted up and cannot ratchet back down without the death of the difference. There is no returning to the small, genuinely freer world of foragers, because that world could feed a tiny fraction of the people now alive. The floor does not, by itself, say that a few must rule the many; it says the many must be coordinated by something, on pain of catastrophe, and a thing that must coordinate millions is a thing a few can capture and then set the field and the dials of. The floor makes the room. It also fixes one edge of every subject's horizon for him, because the exit that might widen his field — the walking-away that would let him see the arrangement from outside and weigh another — is the one option the floor has closed; a man who cannot leave cannot easily see past the only world that will feed him, and the trap that holds his body holds, by the same stroke, the edge of what he can think. What lets the dials be set inside the room the floor makes is the second fact, the one in the mind.

PART 5

The Lock: Why the Dials Can Be Set

> *That coordination so reliably becomes domination because the human mind was assembled for a small world that no longer exists, and several of the features that served it well there function now as points of entry through which the field and the first dial can be set by someone other than the person himself, and a mere symbol made to stand in for an enforcer on the second; that the deepest of these is the sacred-value lock, which carries a built-in drive to punish the violator and to scorn whoever will not punish, so that the people who hold a value do the arrangement's costing for it, for free, against each other; and that all of this rests on a mind that, drowned in a world too large to verify, trusts the marked source rather than the checked claim*

The second foundational fact is cognitive, and it is the reason coordination so reliably becomes domination rather than mere management: the human mind was assembled by evolution for a world that no longer exists, and several of the features that served it well there function, in the world the apparatus created, as points of entry through which the field and the first dial can be set from outside. For almost the whole of the species' existence people lived in small bands — the anthropologist Robin Dunbar's work on the social brain suggests a characteristic figure around a hundred and fifty — everyone known to everyone, status earned in front of witnesses over a lifetime, the group small enough that a defector could be remembered and a bully abandoned. The mind shaped for that world carries features that were precision instruments then and are openings now. People defer, fast and below conscious thought,

TO FIGURES MARKED AS AUTHORITATIVE — A SOUND RULE WHEN the authority was a known elder with a real record, a misfire when it fires on a stranger marked only by a uniform or a title. People bind hard to their in-group and signal belonging through conformity — insurance in a band where exile meant death, now fastened onto nations and parties and faiths at a scale that drains the original logic away. People convert certain commitments into sacred values felt to be beyond all trade-off — a mechanism that made tribal loyalties credible, now firing reliably on the flag, the text, the cause, whatever a person's formation placed there. People reason in stories before they reason in propositions, letting a narrative organise their sense of what is real before the deliberating mind is engaged to ask whether it is true. And people carry, from a childhood formation that installed their basic frameworks before they could evaluate anything, a sunk cost so large that by the time they could question what was installed, questioning it would mean unmaking the self built on it.

These five features are not weaknesses of foolish people. They are features of every human mind, the clever and the suspicious included, and the companion paper treats them at length under the name of the exploit. Two qualifications keep the claim honest. The first is that the framework they rest on — the picture of a fast, automatic layer of cognition beneath a slow, deliberate one, associated above all with Daniel Kahneman — is a useful and well-evidenced model under live debate among psychologists, not a settled map of the brain, and the argument here needs only its uncontroversial core: that much of human response is fast, pre-reflective, and not under deliberate control in the moment. The second is that these features vary in strength across people and cultures and do not fire identically in everyone, which is part of why the machine is a tendency and not a law.

The single best-evidenced of the five, and the one the rest of the argument leans on, is the sacred-value mechanism. The psychologist Philip

Tetlock and his colleagues have shown in the laboratory that people treat certain values as carrying, in effect, infinite significance — refusing even to compute trade-offs against them, and responding to the mere proposal of such a trade-off with moral outrage. The same line of research found something the collection's argument depends on: that the outrage carries with it not only condemnation of the violator but a drive to punish him, and to look down on anyone who shirks the duty of punishing. The sacred-value mechanism comes with a built-in enforcement drive aimed at the violator and at the non-enforcer alike. Hold that finding; it is the hinge on which the self-running machine turns, because it means the people who hold a value will, unprompted, do the costing for the arrangement — they will impose the penalties the second dial requires, against each other, for free.

There is a sixth thing to say, and the part on the field of the visible has already prepared it, because the same architecture that lets the dials be set is what lets the field be drawn. The ancient mind, set down in a world too large for any person to verify, does not check the claims it lives by; it cannot, because the division of knowing has put almost everything it believes beyond its own reach. What it does instead is trust the *marked source* rather than the checked claim — defer to whatever bears the signs of authorised knowing, the credential, the office, the sacred mark — exactly as it once deferred to the proven elder, except that now the mark and the competence have come apart and the mark can be worn without the substance. This is why the field can be drawn for a person at all: he takes the picture of the world that reaches him through the authorised channel as simply the world, because his mind was built to trust the marked teller and was never built to verify a world this size. The authority heuristic and the coalition instinct chiefly serve the second dial, letting a symbol stand in for an enforcer and making the social cost of visible deviation — exclusion from one's people — a penalty felt even when no official is watching. The narrative capture, the

sacred-value lock, and the sunk cost of formation chiefly serve the first dial and the field together, filling the benefit column early and below evaluation while drawing the horizon so that the arrangement looks like the grain of the world. The floor said the many cannot leave. The lock says that the field and the dials of those who cannot leave can be set from outside, because the mind that cannot verify trusts the marked source that draws them. The rest is how an arrangement does the setting — and how far it gets, which is not the same for all.

PART 6

The Build, and Why Not Every Machine Runs Itself

> *That the order begins on the sword, the cost dial doing nearly all the work, force everywhere, the holding dear and the whole thing brittle; that the coalitions which endure attach a belief and install it over generations, until the children formed inside the new story carry it as the grain of the world, the first dial rises, the second is let down, and force withdraws to the margins; but that this is a journey along a gradient of holding-cost which not every order completes, so that the cheap self-running pole — Christendom, the Sunni synthesis, the Mandate of Heaven — and the expensive pole, where the belief never took and the apex must hold the order down by constant force and surveillance, are the same machine at opposite stages; and that reaching the cheap end takes deep formation and the time it requires, sometimes the better part of a thousand years, which many orders never get*

Now the pieces can be assembled into the thing they make, and the assembling must be told as a sequence, because the machine is built in stages and an order can halt, or be halted, at any of them. It begins with the sword, because at the founding it must. A small coalition, bound by a shared interest in the new arrangement's success, takes power by force or its credible threat, because the previous holders will not step aside and the population has not yet been brought inside any framework that would make the new rule feel legitimate. At the founding the second dial is

doing nearly all the work: compliance is coerced, the enforcer is everywhere, the field of the governed still contains the memory of the order that was overthrown and the possibility of another, and the whole thing is expensive and brittle, held only by the cost of defiance kept high at sword-point. This is the condition of the conqueror and the warlord, and on its own it does not last, because force exhausts itself, can be overmatched, and dies with the strongman. A coalition that stops here stays a warlord band: power that must be continuously enforced, commands no loyalty beyond fear, and is swept away by the next stronger band.

The coalitions that endure do something else: they begin to work the first dial and to redraw the field. They attach a belief — they tell a story that explains why their rule is right and not merely victorious, that the gods ordained it, that the blood is chosen, that the people themselves have consented — and they pitch the story to land on the features the last part named, installing it as narrative, as sacred, as the mark of belonging. The first generation, formed under the old world, mostly complies from fear and holds the story thinly; its field still contains the alternative. But the children of that generation are formed from birth inside the new story, before they can weigh it, and to them it is not a claim that was made and could be doubted; it is simply the shape of the world, and the alternative their parents could still see has fallen below their horizon. Over a few generations the conversion tends to take, and the arrangement crosses the decisive line: it no longer rests mainly on the sword, because the population now values what the arrangement rewards, cannot easily see past it, and finds it natural and right. The first dial has been turned up and the field has been drawn, and as they rose the second dial could be let down — the enforcer drawn back from all but the margins — because the people now comply from conviction rather than fear and would think less of themselves if they did not. This is the self-running machine, and when the story has been installed deeply and widely enough, compliance is no longer something the rulers

must produce; it is produced by the governed, who measure their own conduct against the story's requirements, adjust it without instruction, and apply pressure to those around them who deviate, shunning and reporting and punishing the violator and scorning whoever will not join the punishing. They experience none of this as serving the rulers. They experience it as decency, as defending what is sacred, as what a good person does. The rulers do not direct it, do not pay for it, and need not even know its details. The formation has outsourced the second dial to the formed.

Here is the correction this version exists to make, and it is the most important sentence in the paper: not every order completes that build, and the difference between the orders that do and the orders that do not is not a difference of kind but of degree, measured along a single gradient, and it is enormous in the lives of the people inside it. The sequence just told is the *successful* case, run to completion. It describes what happens when the belief takes, deeply and widely, over enough generations. But the belief does not always take, and where it does not, the order does not vanish — it persists at an earlier stage of the build, holding itself together the expensive way, and this is the condition of a great many real arrangements that the careless reader of this argument flattens into the same thing as the settled faith. The variable that sorts them is what the collection calls the holding-cost: how much of its surplus an order must burn, year upon year, to keep its shape. At one pole the holding-cost is near zero, because the governed hold the arrangement up themselves and the rulers' force has retreated to the margins, kept for the heretic and the bandit and the frontier. At the other pole the holding-cost is ruinous, because the belief never took, the governed do not police themselves, and the apex must therefore do continuously and at its own expense the work that conviction does for free at the cheap pole — it must garrison, inform, watch, and coerce, applying force not at the margins but in the centre, every day. These are the same machine. They are not two species of order, one legitimate and one tyrannical; they are one

template at opposite stages of completion, and an order can sit anywhere between them and can move in either direction along the line.

The cheap pole is the pole of the orders that drove their belief so deep that it became the grain of the world. Latin Christendom is the type-case: the child baptised before he could consent, the parish at the centre of existence, the meaning of a good person and of who was rightfully in authority delivered as simply the way things are, by the only authorities he had known, and kept warm thereafter by the approval and contempt of everyone around him — an order that ran, in the main, on the governed's own conviction for the better part of a thousand years, its direct force reserved for the heretic at the margin. The Sunni legal-theological synthesis is another: a vast and durable order of law and practice carried not by a central church but by the scholars who interpreted the sacred sources, reproduced across many states and many centuries, formation so deep that the arrangement persisted through the rise and fall of the dynasties that sat atop it. The Chinese imperial order under the Mandate of Heaven is a third, and perhaps the most striking, because the Mandate was built to survive the fall of any particular dynasty: the emperor as Son of Heaven, the Confucian literati as the interpreter class, the examination system reproducing the formation generation upon generation, the filial and hierarchical values installed from childhood as the structure of reality itself — an order so cheaply held that its basic shape outlasted two thousand years of dynastic turnover, each new dynasty inheriting the running machine rather than building one. These are what *runs itself* means, and they are achievements, reached by orders that survived long enough and formed deep enough to reach them.

The expensive pole is the pole of the orders where none of that happened, or happened and then failed. It is the conquest regime whose robe never took — the Mongol Yuan in China, holding by garrison and by a hierarchy of force over a population it never brought inside its formation,

gone in less than a century where the orders it sat upon lasted millennia. It is the military occupation, which must station a soldier on every corner because the occupied were never formed to obey and never will be. It is colonial rule by a thin foreign elite over a majority it could not and did not form, held by police and informers and the continuous threat of violence, and lasting only as long as the force could be sustained. And it is, in its purest modern form, the total surveillance state, and the surveillance is the tell: an order that must watch everyone is an order whose belief did not take, because the watching is precisely the expensive substitute for the self-policing that the cheap pole gets for free. At the cheap pole the apex need not watch the governed, because the governed watch themselves and one another, their fields drawn so that the arrangement looks like reality and deviation like sin; at the expensive pole the apex must watch the governed, because their fields still contain the alternative and their convictions do not bind them, so the eye and the truncheon must do, daily and at crippling cost, what formation does invisibly and for nothing where it has taken. Surveillance is what a machine needs when it has failed to run itself. This is the single most useful thing the gradient tells the reader: that the quantity of visible force and watching an order requires is the inverse measure of how deep its belief has gone, so that the most oppressive orders are not the strongest but the ones whose hold is shallowest, compelled to spend on coercion what they could not get by conviction.

And the last thing the build teaches is that reaching the cheap pole takes time — the deep formation that makes an order run itself is the slow work of generations, and sometimes of centuries, because a belief must be installed in the children, and in their children, and become the unquestioned grain of the world, before the sword can be set down. Caste, the collection's longest study, took the better part of a thousand years to settle into the deep, self-running form in which the order needed almost no central force at all; Christendom took centuries to drive its belief deep

enough to run on conviction; the Mandate of Heaven was refined across dynasties before it became the thing that every dynasty inherited. A new order founded today begins, like every order, at the expensive pole, on the sword, and faces the same long journey, with no guarantee of completing it: it may drive its belief deep over generations and become cheap and durable, or it may fail to and remain expensive and brittle and be swept away, or it may reach the cheap pole and then slide back when a shock discredits its story or its interpreter class splits, the robe failing while the sword remains, so that the order tumbles back down the gradient into the surveillance-and-force condition it had escaped. The gradient runs both ways, and orders move along it across their lives. That motion — up the gradient toward the cheap self-running pole, or down it toward the expensive pole of force — is most of what the collection's case studies trace, and it is the thing the reader must hold against the temptation to see every arrangement as the same machine running equally well. They are the same machine. They are emphatically not running equally well, and the difference is the whole of what there is to study and, later, the whole of what there is to improve.

PART 7

The Seam: Who Keeps the Values and Works the Valves

> *That a self-running machine has a part no durable version does without, because a story cannot interpret itself and a population formed to revere one is least equipped to reinterpret it; that the division of knowing forces a chokepoint between the people and the sacred thing they cannot read for themselves, and a class arises to hold it — the seam — claiming the knowledge the ordinary person lacks and gaining the power to say what the sacred thing requires today; that this class works two valves, feeding the authorised reading into formation and starving the rival out of it; and that because the sacred rule is rigid for whoever hears it raw and supple for whoever controls its reframing, the seam binds the commoner where it pinches and bends where the powerful need give — so whoever captures or splits the seam resets the dials for a whole population without ever challenging the sacred thing itself*

A self-running machine has a part that is easy to overlook and that no durable version does without, because a story cannot interpret itself, and a population formed to revere a story still needs to be told what the story requires of it today. That part is the interpreter class, and it tends to emerge in every lasting arrangement, whatever the story's content. The need is structural and follows directly from the division of knowing. The sacred text, the founding document, the revealed law — none speaks for itself to a new situation, and the population formed to hold

it sacred is precisely the population least equipped to re-interpret it, because to them it is beyond question rather than open to analysis. So a class arises at the chokepoint between the people and the knowledge they cannot reach, claiming the special competence needed to read the sacred thing correctly: the priests who alone may approach the god and pronounce his will, the scholars who alone have mastered the law, the judges and the learned who alone may say what the constitution means. They claim a knowledge the ordinary person lacks; the ordinary person defers, because the authority heuristic fires on their credentials and the sacred-value lock makes their domain untouchable; and they thereby gain the power to say what the sacred thing requires, which is the power to set the field's current reading and to say which deviations the second dial should punish. The collection calls this position the seam, because it is the join where the people's knowing is stitched to the knowledge they cannot reach for themselves — the necessary connection, and therefore the place where the whole fabric can be worked.

What the seam works is two valves, and naming them makes the whole apparatus of formation and suppression legible as one mechanism with one seat. A person acts only on the contents of his own field, so there are exactly two ways to govern what he believes: control what flows into the field, and control what is kept out of it. The first is the inflow valve, the feeding — the authorised reading poured into formation through the school and the sermon and the rite, installed before the person can weigh it until it is not experienced as a doctrine at all but as his own obvious sense of how things are. The second is the outflow valve, the starving — the rival reading kept out of the field, in the crude case by the banned book and the silenced heretic, but far more cheaply and durably by the simple friction of leaving the alternative unfed, untaught, unavailable, so that it never reaches the people and no one had to forbid it. The seam is the one seat in the whole order that works both valves at once, feeding the compatible account and

starving the costly one, and this is why the interpreter class is the prize that the holders of force are always seeking to capture: not for what it owns, which is little, but for what it works, which is the population's picture of the world.

Here the sacred-value research supplies a second finding, the counterpart to the enforcement drive, and the reason the seam is the place where the structure is both maintained and contested. Tetlock found that while a forbidden trade-off named as a trade-off produces rigid outrage, a substantial minority of people will accept the very same violation when it is rhetorically reframed as something else — as a tragic necessity, or an act of higher principle. The moral boundary turns out to be alternately punitively rigid and forgivingly flexible: rigid for whoever hears the rule raw, flexible for whoever controls the reframing. That flexibility is exactly the seam's lever. The sacred rule binds the commoner absolutely, because he hears it raw; the interpreter, who controls the reframing, can find the reading that permits the powerful the exception the commoner is denied, presenting the exception not as a breach of the sacred rule but as its truer fulfilment. The rule the population enforces on itself with rigid outrage is, in the hands of its interpreters, supple — pinching where it falls on the weak and bending where it falls on the strong, and all without anyone questioning its sacredness. This is the measured lever by which the rule that binds is quietly bent, and it is worked not necessarily by cynics but very often by interpreters who sincerely believe each particular reading they reach, because the leverage was never in their sincerity but in their structural position astride the valves.

And this is why the seam is the hinge of the whole gradient, the place where an order moves up the line or slides down it. An apex that has captured or grown its own interpreter class — bound the priesthood to the throne, credentialed the scholars, endowed the schools — gets the robe carried down into formation and reproduced for free, generation upon

generation, and rides the cheap pole. An apex that fails to secure the seam, or whose seam splits into rival interpreters who will not agree on what the sacred thing requires, finds the robe stranded at the top and never installed below, the feeding valve jammed and the rival readings no longer starved, and the order slides back toward the sword because conviction is no longer doing the holding. This is why so much of the real history of power is a history of struggles over the seam that never touch the sacred thing itself — the contest to capture the church, to control the academy, to own the reading of the founding law — because whoever holds the seam can reset the field and the dials for a whole population without ever challenging the sacredness that makes the resetting stick. The seam is the cheapest place to govern from and the most dangerous place to lose, and the orders that run themselves are, without exception, the orders that kept their seam whole and bound to the centre.

PART 8

The Raised Stone

> *That the whole machine can be seen firing at once in a single act — a crowd stoning a violator under a sacred law that people near the apex composed, generations before, in part to secure their own position; the loaded text inherited not as a faction's instrument but as the word of God, installed from childhood as the first dial and drawn into the field as simple reality; the seam pronouncing which act the law forbids and who has crossed its line; the second dial discharged through the crowd's own hands, the sacred-value mechanism making the violation an outrage that must be punished; so that a threat to the apex's order is removed by the common people, at their own initiative, experiencing the act not as service to the rulers but as righteousness — the few having spent nothing, the many enforcing the few's order and feeling virtuous doing it; the self-running machine at full function, and what the cheap pole looks like from inside*

THE WHOLE MACHINE CAN BE SEEN FIRING AT ONCE IN A single act, and the act the collection returns to as its clearest illustration is the stoning of a violator by the community under a sacred law. It is chosen not to single out any tradition — the structure is universal, and the same figure appears wherever societies have scaled — but because it shows every layer working together in one motion, and because the law in question was, like every such law, written by people.

Consider the layers as they meet in the raised stone. The sacred law was composed over time by people at or near the apex of the arrangement, and among its purposes was the securing of their position: to keep it is to uphold the order they sit atop, and to break it is to threaten that order. That is the loaded text, written in the language of the eternal because that was the only

language that could bind. The law was then inherited, and the generations that received it did not experience it as the work of a faction but as the word of God, installed in them from childhood as sacred and beyond question, and drawn into their field as simply the structure of reality — so that the question of who wrote it, and for whose benefit, was not answered wrongly but never raised, lying out beyond their horizon like the farmer's tide. That is the first dial turned and the field drawn together: a written instrument of an old apex has become the deepest value and the plainest fact of the people who live under it, so that upholding it now sits in their benefit column as a good in itself and stands in their field as reality rather than as a claim that might be false. The interpreter class stands ready to say which acts the law forbids and which persons have crossed its line, claiming the knowledge the crowd lacks and pronouncing the judgment the crowd accepts. That is the seam, working its valves. And then the crowd takes up the stones, and the second dial fires through their own hands: the sacred-value mechanism makes the violation an outrage demanding punishment and carries, as the laboratory found, the drive to punish the violator and to scorn whoever holds back; the coalition instinct makes the violator an enemy of the group and the stoning a proof of one's own belonging; the authority heuristic makes the interpreter's judgment authoritative; and the long narrative capture has made the whole framework feel like reality rather than a claim that might be false.

Now read what has happened. A person who threatened the apex's order has been removed — but not by the apex, which lifted no hand and spent nothing. The threat was removed by the common people, with their own hands, at their own initiative, experiencing the act not as service to the rulers but as righteousness, as the defence of the holy, as the thing a good member of the community does. The governed have enforced the governing order against one of their own, and felt virtuous doing it. The apex wrote the law generations ago and has done nothing since; the machine it built did the

rest. This is the collection's argument compressed into one image: the loaded text written by the few, inherited as sacred by the many, kept by the seam, and enforced — lethally and for free — by the very people it governs, whose enforcement of the few's order is experienced as their own deepest conviction. No conspiracy was needed and none occurred. No one was duped by a lie they would reject if they saw it, because the values the stone-thrower acts on are genuinely his own; his formation placed them in his benefit column, his field was drawn so that the law is reality, and from those values and that field his reasoning is sound. He is not a fool, and he is not a tool who has been tricked against his nature; he is a man reasoning correctly from a benefit column that was filled for him and a horizon that was drawn for him before he could weigh either.

And this is the thing to mark above all, against the temptation to read the whole collection as an account of every order alike: the raised stone is the cheap pole at full function, the self-running machine run to completion, and it is precisely what the expensive pole cannot do. The order that has reached this state spends nothing on enforcement, because the enforcement is volunteered by the governed and felt as virtue. The order that has not reached it — the occupation, the surveillance state, the conquest regime whose robe never took — has no raised stone, because its people do not hold its order sacred and will not lift a hand for it unpaid; it must hire the hand, station the soldier, and watch the crowd that would, in the cheap order, have done its work for free. The raised stone is therefore not an image of how all power operates. It is an image of how power operates when it has succeeded — when it has driven its belief so deep that the governed have become its unpaid enforcers — and the distance between that image and the soldier on the occupied corner is the whole distance of the gradient, the whole difference between a machine that runs itself and a machine that must be run.

PART 9

Durable, Not Inescapable

> *That the natural hope at the end of such an account — that to see the machine is to be freed from it — is mostly too quick, because what seeing runs up against is not an iron law but the two dials and the drawn field, all three set against the seeing: the benefit column filled by a formation the person did not choose, the cost of visible deviation kept real by the community that keeps the account, and the alternative left out of the field so that there is nothing there to see; but that expensive is not impossible, for people do reform their values and redraw their fields, by study and by conversion — though almost always into another formation rather than out of all formation, exchanging one benefit column and one horizon for another, not escaping into a free clarity that does not exist*

THE NATURAL HOPE, AT THE END OF AN ACCOUNT LIKE THIS, is that to see the machine is to be freed from it — that once a person understands how the dials were set and the field was drawn, recognises the loaded text for an old faction's instrument, and grasps that the sacred law was written by people for their own position, the setting comes loose and he walks free. The hope is mostly too quick, but the opposite conclusion, that seeing changes nothing and escape is impossible, is also wrong, and was overstated in the collection's earlier drafts. The truth is in between, and the two dials and the field are what locate it.

What seeing the machine runs up against is not an iron law but three things the arrangement has set against the seeing, and it is worth taking them in turn. Take the first dial. A person's values were installed early,

before he could weigh them, and the values are now genuinely his — the furniture of the self, the standards by which he judges what would even count as a better life. To see through the arrangement is not to flip a switch of fact; it is to call into question the contents of one's own benefit column, which is slow, effortful, disorienting work, and most people, most of the time, have neither the occasion nor the incentive nor the safety to undertake it, not because they are incapable but because nothing in an ordinary life inside a working arrangement demands it and a great deal discourages it. Take the second dial. Even where the seeing begins, the arrangement attaches real costs to acting on it: the person still lives among people whose belonging runs on the shared belief, so visible deviation still carries the genuine penalty of exclusion, imposed by neighbours, not by any official. And take the field, which is the deepest of the three and the one the earlier statement missed. Before a person can question the arrangement he must be able to *see* the alternative, and the field was drawn precisely so that he cannot — the possibility of another order left out of his horizon, the very fact that the sacred law was written by people never raised, so that there is, for most people most of the time, nothing there to see through, the question itself lying beyond the edge of the world his position drew. All three are set against escape: the benefit side skewed toward the arrangement by a formation the person did not choose, the cost side loaded against departure by an accounting his own community keeps, and the field drawn so that the alternative does not appear. That is the real source of the machine's durability — not that it cannot be seen through, but that seeing through it is expensive on both dials and largely foreclosed in the field, and the arrangement is what set all three.

But expensive and foreclosed are not impossible, and this is where the earlier framing went wrong by treating the lock as total. People do see through it. People do change their values in adulthood — sometimes slowly, through study and exposure and the patient work of re-informing

themselves; sometimes fast and wholesale, in the experience usually called conversion or, when it turns against the existing order, radicalisation. And people redraw their fields more readily even than they change their values, because the field moves whenever the position moves: a man set somewhere new is shown things his old position never did, the provincial brought to the capital shown a scale of the world his village never held, the subject who travels or reads or is thrown by some shock into a vantage outside his formation handed, for the first time, a tide his field never contained. The fact of conversion, of radicalisation, of the widened horizon, is the standing proof that the dials can be re-set and the field re-drawn after childhood, that formation is not destiny. And when enough people's dials come loose and fields widen at once — when a shock discredits the story, or the seam splits, or the costs of deviation fall because the enforcer weakens — the machine can fail in the centre and not only at the margins, which is what the collection's historical papers trace in the rare cases of real upheaval.

Two honest qualifications keep this from sliding back into the romantic hope. The first is that re-forming the values and redrawing the field almost never lands a person in some condition of value-free, vantage-free clarity, because there is no such condition: a benefit column cannot be empty and a self cannot be unformed, and no one stands at a position with no horizon, because to stand anywhere is to have a field. What conversion and radicalisation most often do is exchange one set of installed values for another and one drawn horizon for another — to leave one arrangement's formation is, in the usual case, to enter another's, the convert now reasoning soundly from a new benefit column and seeing clearly within a new field that some other movement, faith, or faction supplied. The dial moved, which the old framing said it could not; but it moved to a new setting, not to no setting, and the new setting has its own keepers and its own loaded texts and its own edge beyond which the convert now cannot see. The second qualification is that the costs are real and are paid by real people: the

person who acts on having seen through the arrangement bears the exclusion, the punishment, the lost belonging, and bears it whether or not the seeing was correct. Seeing lowers no cost by itself. It only changes what a person knows he is paying for — which is not nothing, and is sometimes a great deal, but is not the freedom the hope imagined.

PART 10

What Is Possible, and the Whole in One View

> *That the account does not close on despair, because the machine cannot be removed — the floor leads only to mass death and the vacuum reloads it under new names — but it can be built better or worse, and two axes open the whole space of the possible: one running from the expensive force-and-surveillance pole to the cheap self-running one, the other from the cruel arrangement that gives the many no recourse to the restrained one whose loaded texts constrain the few and whose seam is kept plural and contestable; that the work which is neither the romantic's delusion of tearing the machine down nor the cynic's surrender of calling all arrangements equal is to crowd the seam, keep the dials hard to set from a single hand, and push a given order toward the cheap-and-restrained corner that is the best the species has reached; and that this is the whole in one view, held, like everything here, as tested, not revealed*

Foreseeing the machine does not by itself free anyone, and the machine cannot be wished away, and the floor beneath it leads only to mass death, the account can seem to close on despair. It does not, and the distinction that saves it is the one the collection most wants its reader to carry, because it is the difference between a useful truth and a paralysing one: the machine cannot be removed, but it can be built better or worse, and the difference between a better and a worse one is enormous in the lives of the people inside it. Every governing arrangement runs the same

ENGINE ON THE SAME KIND OF MIND THROUGH THE SAME KIND OF formation, so the question is never whether a people will be governed by a managed belief — the only alternative to a managed belief is the warlord's vacuum, where the second dial returns wholly to the sword and life is worse for almost everyone. The question is always *which* belief, managed *how*, drawing the field toward what can be seen and the first dial toward what values, and leaving the many *how much* recourse when the dials are turned against them.

Here the gradient of the sixth part must be joined to a second axis, because the two are not the same and conflating them is its own kind of black-and-white error. The first axis is the one already drawn: from the expensive pole, where the order is held down by constant force and surveillance because its belief never took, to the cheap pole, where the order runs itself on the governed's own conviction. That axis measures how the order is held, and the cheap pole is better on it, because an order that need not coerce its people daily is, by that fact alone, less brutal to live under than one that must. But cheapness is not the same as kindness, and the second axis measures something the first does not: how much the arrangement, however cheaply held, leaves the many in the way of recourse. An order can run itself cheaply and still be built so that the loaded texts are read only ever in the apex's favour, the seam wholly captured, the population's self-policing turned entirely to the few's protection, and the many left with no channel by which to press the arrangement toward their own interest. Or an order can be built so that the loaded texts contain, in their universal language, real constraints on the few that the many can invoke; so that the seam is divided and contestable rather than unified and owned; so that there are channels, real if partial, through which the governed can press the arrangement toward their own interest without tearing down the apparatus that feeds them. These are both cheap orders, both self-running, and they are worlds apart in what they are to live inside, and the difference is the

second axis — not how the order is held, but for whom, and with how much give. The whole space of the actually possible is the field these two axes open, and the best corner of it, the corner worth the whole of the work, is the one that is at once cheap and restrained: held by conviction rather than force, and built so that the conviction the many hold can be turned, through real channels, back upon the few.

This is what the collection means by institutional friction: the deliberate construction and defence of arrangements that make the field and the dials expensive to set from a single hand. Friction keeps the seam contestable, so that no one faction owns the reading of the sacred thing and the inflow valve cannot pour a single story into every head; it keeps the narrative channels plural, so the field cannot be drawn by a monopoly and the outflow valve cannot starve every rival; it keeps a measure of security in reach, so the cost of deviation on the second dial does not rise to the point where no one can afford to dissent; it distributes authority, so that no single node can fill the benefit column and keep the account and pronounce the law and draw the field all at once. The collection's keyword for the whole of this, carried over from its studies of the seam, is to *crowd* the chokepoint rather than to empty it — for the seam cannot be abolished, the division of knowing being permanent, and the attempt to abolish it only clears the ground for a worse occupant, the demagogue who razes the plural interpreters and stands alone in the seat he emptied. The friction is not the removal of the machine, which is impossible; it is the keeping of the machine plural and open, so that its necessary positions are owned by no single hand. None of these is sufficient, each is partial, and all require constant maintenance, because the tendency of the machine is always to re-concentrate; but together they are the conditions under which setting the field and the dials against the many is most costly and most contested. The arrangements of the modern liberal order, whatever else is true of them, tend to leave more such recourse than the arrangements that preceded them

— which is not the same as freedom, and is very far from equality, and is held here without triumph, but is also not nothing, and is the kind of thing worth defending and worth improving.

This is the reformist rather than the revolutionary conclusion, and it is reached not from timidity but from the same analysis that produced everything above. The delusion is the romantic dream of tearing the machine down to free the people underneath, which kills the people the floor cannot release and rebuilds the machine from the vacuum, the next coalition setting the field and the dials afresh and usually more cruelly, having destroyed the plural authorities that might have checked it. The surrender is the cynic's conclusion that, since the machine cannot be removed, all arrangements are equally a fraud and none worth defending — the very flattening this rewriting exists to refuse, the error that sees the surveillance state and the restrained republic as the same machine and so hands the dials to whoever wants them most. Between the two is the only work that is neither delusion nor surrender: to know the machine exactly, to give up the hope of standing outside all formation, and to spend one's effort on the difference between its better and worse forms — which is the only difference that was ever actually available to be made.

Set the parts together and the machine stands complete. The engine is cost and benefit, run by every person from his own position — but beneath it the position draws the field of what he can see, and within that field two dials are set that nature does not set: what he counts as a benefit, filled by the values his formation installed before he could weigh them, and whether a cost is real, which depends on whether anyone is keeping account. The floor, the metabolic trap, is why the person whose field and dials are being set cannot simply leave: the apparatus that feeds the modern world has grown the population past any number the unimproved land could hold, and the exit leads to death, not freedom. The lock, the ancient mind in the modern environment, is why the field can be drawn and the first dial set

from outside at all, and why a symbol can stand in for an enforcer on the second — because a mind that cannot verify a world this size trusts the marked source that draws its picture for it. The build runs from the sword to the self-running machine: force sets the cost dial at the founding, a belief is attached and installed over generations until the benefit dial carries the load and the field is drawn so the order looks like reality, and the enforcer withdraws to the margins because the formed now keep their own account and punish their own deviants for free. But the build is a journey along a gradient that not every order completes, so that the same machine runs itself cheaply at one pole — Christendom, the Sunni synthesis, the Mandate of Heaven, the orders that drove their belief deep over centuries — and must be held down by constant force and surveillance at the other, the surveillance being the tell of a belief that never took. The seam keeps the values current and works the two valves, feeding the authorised reading and starving the rival, binding the rule on the many while bending it for the few. And the whole of it can be seen in the single act of a crowd raising stones against a violator under a law that people wrote for their own position generations before — the few having spent nothing, the many enforcing the few's order with their own hands and their own conviction and their own sense of doing right, which is the cheap pole at full function and the thing the expensive pole can never buy.

That is how the few tend to govern the many: not mainly by force, which is too expensive and too brittle to hold anything for long, and not by a lie the many would reject if they saw it, but by setting, on the floor of a trap no one can leave and through the lock of a mind that can be reached, the field a person can see and the two dials by which he decides — drawing the horizon so the arrangement looks like the world, filling the benefit column so it feels like his own, and arranging the cost column so that deviation is punished, increasingly by the governed themselves. It is durable wherever it sets all three deeply and reproduces that setting cheaply across

the generations, and it is brittle and cruel wherever it does not and must hold itself down by the sword. It is not inescapable, because the dials can be re-set and the field re-drawn — by study, by conversion, by the widened horizon — though almost always into a new formation rather than out of all formation. And it cannot be removed, because there is nowhere outside formation to stand and the floor releases no one; it can only be built better or worse, cheaper or dearer, with more recourse for the many or with none, and the whole of what is humanly available is the movement of a given order through that space toward its better corner. The collection exists to describe the machine exactly, in the conviction that a thing seen clearly can be built better than a thing not seen at all — and to refuse, in the same motion, both the despair that says all machines are equal and the dream that says the machine can be escaped, because the clear sight of how the few have always governed the many is the only foundation on which anyone might govern them a little less cruelly than before. It is held, like everything in this work, as tested, not revealed.

The Machine That Runs Itself is the foundational statement of the Patterns of Power series — the engine every other study assumes, here rewritten to carry what the later work has added: that beneath the two dials a position draws the field of the visible, so that whoever governs what a person can see has governed his decision before he weighs it; and that the machine is a gradient and not a binary, the same template running itself cheaply in the orders that drove their belief deep and held down by constant force and surveillance in the orders that did not, with the long journey between them the real subject of the case studies. The framework and its vocabulary — managed belief, the floor of force, the two dials, the holding-cost, the seam, the field of the visible — are thomas J. Bryan's, worked out across a long collaboration. The research, the verification, the structure, and the composition are Claude's. Released under the Creative Commons Attribution–NonCommercial 4.0 International

licence. It is offered, like the machine it describes, to be seen clearly and argued with — tested, not revealed.